

Shortly after the radio in their truck broadcasted the "hold the crews" alert, Foreman Asher Guess and his crew parked in the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant at Frankfort Avenue and Lexington Road and watched as the tornado passed five blocks away and homed in on the neighborhood near the Louisville Water Company pumping station.

"There was quite a roar when it crossed Frankfort, and then there were poles, trees, everything in the street. We knew we were in for a long night," he said.

That "night" would begin with the all-out effort to restore power to the water company. It would not end until 4 p.m. Thursday, 31 hours after their Wednesday work shift began at 9 a.m.

Guess' crew returned to work at midnight Thursday to begin a series of 10 to 20 hour work days that would obliterate the Easter holiday and extend through Friday, April 19. Like many other company crews, Guess' group enjoyed its first day off of the month on Saturday, April 20.

"I've been here 18 years, and I've never seen anything to compare with the damage or amount of work we had to do," Guess said.

That work was not confined to Louisville.

William Andis and his crew picked their way through traffic to reach the Cloverport transmission line near Irvington, where five transmission pole structures had disintegrated in the storm.

Temporary Line to Louisville Water Company, Crescent Hill Hillcrest Substation



Without sleep, they moved on the following day to Madison, Ind., where the generating station partially owned by L G & E had been hit, along with six steel transmission towers.

Before the storm, two of those towers, one of which is L G & E's responsibility to maintain, stood in the floodplain of the Ohio River.

"We worked until 4:30 Friday morning pulling wire out of the river; they were afraid it would tangle up the barge traffic," Andis said.

Forty-three and one-half hours after going to work Wednesday morning, Andis' crew rested for the first time. But only until 2 p.m. Friday, when they resumed the two-week work marathon.

During the two weeks it took to restore service to all neighborhoods, some 1,000 persons in L G & E crews logged 124,381 man-hours.

But they were not without help from outside sources.

Louisville's disaster dispelled any notion that L G & E could comply with an urgent request for crews to help restore service in areas of Indiana which experienced tornadoes two hours earlier.

And L G & E was having some trouble finding help, too. One executive telephoned the president of Kentucky Utilities in Lexington. He apologized for not being able to send help. He was sitting in the dark during the phone conversation while all available KU

crews were repairing storm damage to their own system.

But help from other sources would soon be on the way.

*"The several crews you dispatched from Ashland have been of significant help in achieving a monumental reconstruction of a large segment of our electrical distribution system . . ."*

On Tuesday, April 2, his second day on the job as a lineman with Kentucky Power Company in Ashland, young Orville Adkins expressed disappointment that he was not called out to work trouble caused by Monday evening's storm.

"You'll get your turn," Foreman Dave Lang assured him.

Late the next afternoon, Lang, Adkins and 17 other members of Kentucky Power Company crews were en route to Louisville, and Orville Adkins would not see another free evening until April 13. They came from Ashland, Pikeville and Hazard, and their experience ranged from zero to more than three decades, but they shared this observation by Farris Erwin of Hazard:

"I've been in this kind of work for 30 years, and we've had some pretty rough storms and high waters, but I've never seen any damage to compare with this."

The Kentucky Power Company crew members each logged nearly 100 hours in eight working days before returning to Eastern Kentucky.

They were in good company.

By the time David Oller gathered up his Power-Tel Corporation crew and their equipment for the 580-mile drive from Cordele, Ga., it already was 9 p.m. Thursday. They drove all night, arrived at 3 p.m. Friday, and stayed on the job until 9 p.m.

For Oller, it was a homecoming of sorts. A Louisville native, he still has family here, including a younger brother, Kenny. But the Oller brothers didn't get much chance to visit. Kenny is an L G & E lineman who was still pulling long shifts when the Power-Tel crew headed back south.

In all, Power-Tel sent 19 men from Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee. Some of those men, like Edgar Wright, Jr., of Lyons, Ga., had helped put New Orleans back together after the 1965 hurricane.

"The overall devastation there was worse because a hurricane covers a lot wider area," he said.

"But I've never seen the kind of devastation that is concentrated here," he added, with a sweeping gesture toward the debris that was Indian Hills.

A total of 149 men came from out-of-town power companies and from local contractors to aid in the massive drive to restore L G & E's transmission system. These men logged a total of 20,378 hours in little more than a week.

Both local and out-of-town firms won commendation from L G & E President B. Hudson Milner. Typical was this letter to a power company that had sent help:

"I want to express my sincere appreciation for your concern for, and support of, our restoration efforts following last Wednesday's devastating tornado in the Louisville area.

"You can indeed take pride in the men who joined our effort. They worked with skill and efficiency, combined with a willingness to do whatever was asked of them and to stay with the task for however many hours had to be compressed into a day.

"Our thanks are extended, also, to their associates who stayed behind and picked up a little greater share of the work load so that these men could be released.

"Only by seeing can one conceive of the damage which was wrought. Certainly, I hope you are never faced with such disaster; however, if we can ever return this monumental favor, I hope you will give us the opportunity."

Frankfort Avenue at Stilz

